In the Claims

1. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising the steps of:

a) reducing the absorbed oxygen in the polyester-based resin by contacting the resin with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere;

b) heating the polyester-based resin in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded;

c) creating a preform from the melt by injection molding in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere.

2. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 1, wherein the drying step (a) occurs at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C.

3. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, wherein steps (b) and (c) occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

4. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, wherein the drying step (a) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

5. (Currently amended) A preform made using ~~the method of Claim 1~~ a method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, the method comprising the steps of:

drying the polyester-based resin in an environment to reduce the absorbed oxygen in the polyester-based resin by introducing an inert gas into a drying hopper containing a supply of the polyester-based resin, wherein the inert gas contacts the polyester-based resin during drying of the polyester-based resin prior to a step of melting the polyester-based resin, the inert gas depleting oxygen attached to the polyester-based resin in the drying hopper;

heating the polyester-based resin to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded;

creating a preform from the molten poly-ester based resin.

6. (Currently amended) A preform made ~~using the method of Claim 2~~ as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C.

7. (Currently amended) A preform made ~~using the method of Claim 3~~ as in Claim 5, wherein the heating and creating steps occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

8. (Currently amended) A preform made ~~using the method of Claim 4~~ as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

9. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, further comprising the step, following (c), of blow molding a bottle from the preform.

10. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising the steps of:

a) contacting the polyester-based resin with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C for a predetermined time;

b) heating the polyester-based resin in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded; and

c) creating a preform from the melt by injection molding.

11. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform as recited in Claim 10, wherein step (a) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

12. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform as recited in Claim 10, wherein step (b) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

13. (Currently amended) A preform made using [the method of Claim 10] a method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, the method comprising the steps of:

drying a supply of polyester-based resin by contacting the supply of polyester-based resin, prior to heating and molding, with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C for a predetermined time to form oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin;

heating the oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin to a temperature above the melting point until the oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin can be injection molded; and

creating a preform from the molten oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin by injection molding.

14. (Currently amended) A preform made [using the method of Claim 11] as in Claim 13, wherein the drying step occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

15. (Currently amended) A preform made [using the method of Claim 12] as in Claim 13, wherein the heating and creating steps occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

16. (Withdrawn) An apparatus for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising:

a) a drying hopper having an outlet;

b) an injection molding machine receiving polyester-based resin from the drying hopper outlet; and

c) means for injecting an inert gas, connected to the drying hopper near the outlet.

17. (Withdrawn) An apparatus as recited in Claim 16, wherein the means for injecting an inert gas is a gas line and a pressure regulator.

18. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere.

19. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein, during the heating step, the polyester-based resin is in contact with inert gas migrated from the drying hopper.

20. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step comprises introducing an inert gas to the supply of polyester-based prior to the heating step, and wherein during the heating step, the polyester-based resin is contacted with inert gas migrated from its introduction during the drying step.